

## STATE OF RURAL SERVICES 2024

*The State of Rural Services 2021* (Rural England 2022) represented a slight departure from earlier State of Rural Service reports in that it focused on assessing the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, whilst earlier surveys had sought to present an assessment of a range of services. It has been suggested that the 2024 report should return to a general assessment, potentially serving to provide some form of general baseline assessment for an incoming Government, albeit with a focus on a narrower range of particular services.

Table 1 shows a summary of the focus of earlier reports, along with some proposed foci for a 2024 Survey.

**Figure 1: Foci of Past State of Rural Services (SORS) Report and Proposed for 2024 Report**

Topics	SORS Report			
	2016	2018	2021	2024
Broadband & mobile connectivity		Yes		Yes (including examination of ultra/superfast broadband)
Accommodation & catering				Yes
Cash	Yes		Yes	
Childcare				Yes
Community Assets	Yes		Yes	
Further education	Yes			Yes, but widened to include further stages of education
Hospitals & physical health services	Yes	Yes		Yes, but to include dentistry.
Leisure space			Yes	
Local bus services & community transport	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mental health services	Yes			Yes, where possible differentiating between provision for adults and young people
Older people's services	Yes			Yes
Personal advice service		Yes		
Public library services		Yes		
Shops & on-line services	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Warm spaces				Yes
Welfare services (benefits, employment services)	Yes		Yes	
Young People's Services		Yes		

The suggested items for the 2024 in part reflect the frequency of study in earlier reports, so issues such as education, mental health and old people's services are included because they have not been a focus in SORS since 2015. These are also all issues that were raised as significant in the small towns study. This also raised the issue of ultra-superfast broadband speed availability, as well as public transport, shops and on-line retailing, so it proposed to include these issues, even though these have been studied relatively frequently with SORS reports. Issues of health service

access have been repeatedly raised over recent years, including concerns over ambulance waiting times, access to defibrillators and mental health care, so it is suggested that health service provisions could be usefully incorporated into the 2024 survey. It is important to note, however, that access to data on some of these areas of interest may be a significant limiting factor: the House of Commons' (2023) *Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee Report on Rural Mental Health*, for example, has explicitly commented on the lack of information related to rural mental health, while national datasets on ambulance services do not include any rural-urban differentiation. Other issues raised in the small towns study included the accommodation and catering sector and access to electric vehicle charging points, as part of wider concerns over the state of rural town centres and climate change mitigation respectively. It is therefore proposed to also include analysis of these services, and also the provision of warm spaces and other schemes to address issues of fuel costs.

### Potential work plan

This project on the state of rural services provision will be developed as follows.

Stage		Content	Timescale
1	Project initiation	Review and sign off Project Plan.	July 2024
2	Review of existing materials and identification of secondary data sources	Review of source materials used in previous, SORS reports and consideration of further datasets.	July 2024
3	Accessing and collation of relevant dataset	Gain access to relevant datasets, download data and enter in relevant analysis software (Excel, QGIS)	July-August 2024
4	Analyse datasets	Develop basic statical summaries, graphs and maps	July-September2024
5	Draft written project report	Create draft for comment	September 2024
5	Finalise report	Revise / finalise the report. Produce launch and dissemination plan. Have report formatted for publication.	October 2024

### Project outputs

The main output from the project will be a written report for publication, setting out the evidence base in a structured way and outlining the main findings, whilst flagging some implications for policy. This report will include a summary.

A dissemination plan will be produced towards the end of the project, to ensure that target audiences are identified and appropriate means to reach them are adopted.

A PowerPoint presentation will also be prepared, based on the report, for use at meetings and events. This will be required in time for the launch of the report.

### **Project Resources**

The project will be funded from within RE's own resources which it derives from its supporters' financial contributions.

Martin Phillips will lead the project and will be involved in all aspects of the research, plus be the main author of the project report. Help with data collection and analysis will be provided by a Research Assistant based at the University of Leicester.

Members of the RE Stakeholder Group will be invited to input by supplying evidence or intelligence that their organisations' have gathered about changing levels of service provision and the role and challenges of voluntary service provisions. A sub-set of the RE Stakeholder Group will be invited to form a project Steering Group, to provide guidance at key stages (see below). This will involve reviewing documents and the draft final report, as well as being asked for advice where appropriate.

External PR advisers may be commissioned in due course to assist with the project report launch, including any sell-in to the print and broadcast media.

### **Project Timescale**

Project activity would commence in July 2024 presuming an agree project plan has been agreed.

### **Management and oversight**

The project lead will report on progress and any issues arising to RE Directors. That will ensure the project delivers within the resources available to RE and at a pace which meets plans for the report launch.

As noted above, a sub-set of the RE Stakeholder Group will be invited to form a project Steering Group. They will have an advisory role, offering guidance to the project lead. That is likely to include suggesting relevant datasets, reviewing key documents and contributing ideas at the report drafting stage, before it is sent round the wider Steering Group, as well as being available for advice or a steer where appropriate.

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Project plan version 1.2  
26<sup>th</sup> June 2024